

### Science and religion

Born in an age of religious revivalism amidst scientific scepticism, Mahendralal braved the cross-currents and evolved a synthetic view of science and religion. He was a firm God-believer but against exhibitionism and attempts to put any man on the throne of God. Through his deep studies he observed how the early liberalism of an established church gradually degenerated into dogmatic belief.

Swami Vivekananda shared Mahendralal's deep faith in modern science and aversion towards religious over-emotionalism and obscurantism as exhibited by some Vaishnavas and Theosophists respectively. Of course they differed on the notion of *Avatara* or Incarnationhood, but we have Sri Ramakrishna's famous statement : "He does not believe in *Avatara*. So what ? He believes in God". A worthy follower of David Hare and Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Mahendralal was closest in his view to his colleague, the Jesuit monk Reverend Father Eugene Lafont who had deep interest in God and 'His positive works', namely the entire created universe which demands deep scientific studies. According to Lafont and Sircar, one kind of truth (science) cannot be opposed to another kind of truth (religion). Our duty, according to Swami Vivekananda and Sir Joseph Needham, is to syncretise science and religion. Mahendralal was an able proponent of this view.

### The man of vision

As the IACS enters the 21st Century, it may perpetuate the memory of its visionary Founder by creating two new Centres of Study—one on Consciousness Research, a recent trend trying to synthesise science and religion, and the other on History of Science. Both these ideas would have been dear to Dr. Mahendralal Sircar's heart.

Mahendralal viewed science not merely as a tool or profession but as a way of life. Swami Vivekananda agreed with him that 'scientific' or logical approach is universal and applicable to the spiritual domain as well.

Towards the end of his life, Mahendralal was dismayed that his mission of rejuvenating India through science had not been fulfilled. But then he overcame his pessimism when he realised that his dream was bound to be fulfilled some day through the advent of sound educational infrastructure, intellectual climate, national leadership and political independence. Within three years after the demise of its Founder, the IACS welcomed a young man named C.V. Raman in its premises. On receiving the Nobel Award, the mature scientist exclaimed : "Dr. Sircar had sown the seed and it has fallen to my lot to reap the harvest".

Father Lafont commented after Mahendralal's death in 1904 : "Dr. Sircar was a man such as you find seldom in large communities, even in Europe".

Earlier we have referred to Ana Turkhud Pandurang, the young girl from Bombay who was accepted by Mahendralal as his foster-daughter. When deeply steeped in

pessimism, Mahendralal found himself consoled through Ana's words. One of her letters was so good that Mahendralal quoted it in his diary dated 11 May 1879. We conclude this article by providing a brief excerpt. Ana wrote to Mahendralal :

"The World is cruel and is slow to recognize worth. But do not suppose that your life and labour—unappreciated as it may have been—has been wasted. You may never be satisfied, but the fruit will remain, and though you may doubt it now, men will yet rise up to call you blessed".

It may be safely presumed that the whole Nation concurs with Ana. India is destined to revive its scientific tradition, in action and spirit, and then Dr. Mahendralal Sircar's vision will shine in full glory.